



DEPARTMENT OF METRO PARKS
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

GREG FISCHER
MAYOR

SEVE GHOSE, CPRE
DIRECTOR

Naturalization

Over the last few years our park users, golf course players, and residents may have noticed changes in the way some of our parks, golf courses, and green spaces are being managed and maintained. We term this **naturalization**.

Naturalization is a process by which a disturbed site is restored to its natural heritage and ecological function by encouraging the establishment of native plant species.

Louisville Metro Parks and Recreation is committed to protecting the health of our natural environment and ensuring these areas are functional for both flora and fauna, and also for people to enjoy. Louisville Metro Parks and Recreation currently practices four main types of naturalization--- establishment of No-Mow areas, tree planting, establishing prairies, and wetland restoration.

The No-Mow areas continue to be established at our golf courses, along our waterways, and in our larger parks and open spaces through eliminating mowing, reducing mowing, or raising the height of the cut. We have introduced several acres of prairie, working with our partner, the Olmsted Parks Conservancy, at three of the Olmsted designed parks, Cherokee (20 acres), Seneca (10 acres), and Iroquois (25 acres). These areas go through regular controlled burns to reinvigorate the site and drop more seed for new growth. These areas also provide for the growth of vegetation that will improve water quality while providing deeper roots to reduce erosion, especially by our waterways. Under our larger trees we are taking strides to avoid mowing as the trees need well aerated soils. Mowing beneath trees can compact the soil causing branch tips to die, usually beginning at the top of the tree and eventually killing it. Along our existing natural areas and at our golf courses, reducing or eliminating mowing will provide a buffer zone that encourages native plant species to spread.



A NATIONALLY ACCREDITED PARKS AND RECREATION AGENCY

WWW.LOUISVILLEKY.GOV

P. O. BOX 37280 LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY 40233-7280 PHONE: 502.456.8100 FAX: 502.456.3269 TDD: 502.456.8183
WEB: METRO-PARKS.COM WEB: BESTPARKSEVER.COM EMAIL: PARKS@LOUISVILLEKY.GOV

We look forward to supplementing these areas with native wildflowers to add aesthetic beauty, selecting the species carefully to offer deep roots.

Each year we plant over a thousand trees throughout the system and especially in vulnerable areas. In doing so we also are careful to introduce trees native to the area that will increase the success rate of the trees growing to maturity.

Naturalization is a long-term process and some areas can take many years to develop into vibrant and diverse natural communities. The initial phases of naturalization can often result in weed problems. Mechanical methods such as hand pulling or cutting are often employed to control the weeds. Eventually, the transition will lead to a more stable and diverse collection of native plants, and weeds will be reduced.

The benefits of these natural areas to our well-being and the health of our environment outweighs the possible problems. With continued commitment from Louisville Metro Parks and Recreation and the community, our natural landscape will be fostered and preserved for the future. Naturalization will improve the stream health and provide greater riverbank stability. Restoring the natural vegetation along riverbanks filters pollutants, reduces erosion, and provides a healthier environment for fish and other aquatic species. Naturalization also preserves historic or heritage trees, reintroduces prairie grasses and wildflowers, and restores majestic river bottom forests and creates healthy wetlands. Natural areas provide a place for a greater variety of wildflowers and other plants. These plants attract and sustain a diversity of birds and butterflies. Natural wetlands and naturalized retention basins remove pollutants from run-off water before it flows downstream into our rivers.

Overall these practices cut fuel costs, mower purchasing and maintenance costs, reduce algae blooms in our ponds and retention basins, eliminate expensive chemical applications, and curb noise and air pollution. We need the community's help in passing this message to the populace and look forward to the end gain of carbon neutrality or raised reduction in the coming years.

Action Step: Louisville Metro Parks and Recreation will strategically identify areas of most pressing need that will enhance the environment through naturalization. These areas will include the many stream banks and nearby areas, and unused or untraversed open areas at the parks and golf courses. In studies conducted, the typical savings from converting one acre of open space to naturalization, in a Midwest growing season of seven months, is \$987 per acre. With the continual budget struggles and growth in the department's scope of responsibility it is incumbent on us to look at ways to be responsible stewards of not only the tax payers money but of the environment, leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to partake of the largesse we have so much enjoyed through the years. Educating the community on these benefits and the end result will be vital to successfully carrying out this program. The goal should be 500 acres for each of the next three years, and then analyzing the data to strategize next steps.